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De illegalen. Illegaliteit in Twente & het aangrenzende Salland 1940-1945.

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Summary

RESISTANCE WORKERS – The resistance movement in Twente and bordering Salland

The military occupation of the Netherlands by German army units in the early days of May, 1940, was accompanied by a political change of power. From that time on, new, foreign rulers attempted to involve the population of the occupied territory in achieving their political aims.

The greater part of the population took an ever growing aversion to their principal aims, viz. the elimination of the Jews from Dutch society, the nazification of the population by 'levelling' the social institutions, and the placing of the Dutch industrial production in the service of the German war economy.

For less than one percent of the Dutch people, this aversion led to actual, systematic violation of the new laws and regulations, which had been laid down with a view to the realization of the aforementioned goals.

In this dissertation we have attempted to show who these resistance workers were, and what significance their resistance workers were, and what significance their resistance activities had. By giving a detailed description of their social background we have tried to arrive at realistic statements about the relation between their social status and the fact that it was actually they who went underground.

Due particularly to its social diversity, Twente and bordering Salland have proved to be an extremely suitable region for a study, representative of the Netherlands, about which persons exactly responded to the new situation with resistance work. Economically and culturally it was a unit in which we have found widely divergent population groups in a proportion little different from that which pertained to the country as a whole at the time.

As regards its landscape, we found in this relatively small region with over 300,000 inhabitants, a largely diversified agricultural rural area with big and small arable and dairy farming. In some villages and towns the population was almost entirely Catholic, in others largely Protestant, and others in turn 'mixed'. Approximately one percent of the population was Jewish. The Jewish community in Enschede counted over 1,400 souls.

In the cities, with a disproportionate representation of allochtons in high class and industrial positions, factory workers formed the largest population group. Enschede and Almelo relied for the greater part on their textile industry and, from an economic point of view, Hengelo was more of a mixed town with its big metallurgical concerns. The Twente support for the national political parties corresponded largely with that of the nation as a whole. The co-existence of such a large variety of population groups in this relatively small, and therefore surveyable region enabled us to accurately determine the following: what the reaction was of each population group to the measures of the conquerer, who went underground and how resistance work was organized.

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As a consequence, we were not only able to draw conclusions with respect to the influence of the differences between the population groups on the development of resistance activities, but we could also ascertain the extent to which resistance work affected these differences.

A close description of how various forms of resistance could take shape enabled us to answer the question how much the segregation of society, which was so typical of that time, affected the resistance movement, or, in other words, the extent to which the segregation hindered cooperation between resistance workers.

Based on this we could draw conclusions about the degree to which the measures of the occupier have led within the various sociopolitical groups to resistance activities and we could show that resistance activities were closely connected to one's social position.

A second, no less important advantage, which Twente offered us as a representative field of study, were the many possibilities, owing to the widely variegated population and the consequently multifaceted composition of the resistance movement, to study the regional validity of the current, overall, national image of the resistance movement. Thus, we could establish the extent to which the 'national' resistance organizations have really seen a national growth. We have also been able to see how decision processes at the top of resistance organizations, extensively described by the national historiographer, De Jong, and the outcome of these processes have affected the doings of the 'common' resistance worker. As a result, we could get a better idea of the significance of the decisions taken by the top and we could establish whether the picture he described must be characterized as Holland-centred and rather too top-oriented, and the degree to which this is so.

The traditionally strong ties between the autochthon part of the urban population and that of the surrounding countryside, which is typical of Twente, made it possible for us to show how the development of forms of resistance closely corresponded to these local circumstances.

Finally, Twente, as a border region, enabled us to study what part this special geographical location played in relation to the development of resistance activity.

We conclude by establishing that, with this thorough inventory of resistance work in Twente and the elucidation of its social backgrounds, we have not only given a rough historical outline of the resistance movement in the region, but have also added relevant information as a result of the approach described here.

Thus, the epic picture of a people fighting its conquerer, cultivated at commemorations, could be replaced by a history which shows us what the reaction was in the occupied Netherlands to the new political situation, the consequences of which and the reaction thereto differing for each individual person.

Now let us move on to the most striking findings of our study.

Firstly, we have been able to assess rather accurately the number of resistance workers. This must have been between 800 and 1,000, which is approximately 0.3 percent of the population in the region concerned.

Contrary to De Jong, we consider the question whether this is a large or small percentage, irrelevant. An answer to this question would take us to normative considerations, which we have wanted to avoid as much as possible. We have merely established that the number of resistance workers has grown to the extent that the need for resistance work was felt.

Someone went underground the moment a choice had to be made: either complying with or contravening the measure of the occupying force, which one faced; either helping persecuted persons who made an appeal, or keeping away from them; actually seeking the resistance struggle against the occupier, or leaving it at feelings of aversion. For some the moment to choose came early, for others late, and for some it did not come at all. Apart from individual qualities, the social position was a particularly deciding factor. Clear indications of this are i.a. the large number of civil servants who were active in the resistance movement, and the fact that organized resistance work in Twente had mainly been a matter of the higher strata of the urban population. In this respect it is typical of Twente that in the initial phase of the development of the various resistance organizations allochtons played a leading role. The region was used to the inspirational and organizational activities of 'foreigners'. In this regard we have ascertained that the neglected, isolated position of the Catholics in Twente had demonstrable effects on the organized resistance movement.

When we ask ourselves what our detailed, regional picture of the resistance movement adds to what De Jong has given us, apart from what has already been mentioned, two things immediately come to the fore. Firstly, we find that the 'organized' resistance movement was in fact a collection of often extremely thin webs of contacts, which were partly interwoven. The greater part of the resistance workers in Twente – and maybe in the country as well – did not learn about resistance organizations and their names until after Liberation Day.

The terms 'group' and 'organization' therefore must not be understood in their usual meanings, but only as indications of webs of resistance contacts. Not until after the war were they defined as resistance organizations by the – rather top-oriented – national historiographers.

A second striking conclusion concerns the effects of the segregation and the strong social stratification on the resistance movement. De Jong's conclusion that in particular the lower strata in the resistance movement saw resistance work as 'activities where the old political and religious controversies had fully vanished' and 'where one helped one another with the actual work, and certainly did not obstruct one another', does, if so formulated, not apply to the region we studied. In Twente, Protestants, Catholics, Socialists and Communists mostly operated independently, not so much because of unwillingness to cooperate, but because they did not know each other. One lived and dealt with the changes brought about by the occupation in one's own circle. One was totally unaware of other people's resistance activities. The 'Blok' student group, which did not belong to any of the segments of the population, but had access to them, therefore had a bridge function.

Also, the solidarity between the resistance leaders, which De Jong had found – 'they stood side by side in their struggle against the occupier, and from that common stance they assisted each other when needed' – was the exception rather than the rule in Twente. Not until the summer of 1944, when the chaos in the paramilitary resistance movement had assumed dangerous proportions, did some need arise in that side of resistance life for more than marginal cooperation. However, as coordination of resistance work is concerned, nothing much was achieved at the end of the war.

The Dutch Forces of the Interior were no more than a formal unit in Twente, and hardly anyone in the region knew how they were organized. They were no more than

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a sort of resistance authority – 'One acted in the name of Prince Bernard' – through which a number of resistance activities could more or less be centralized. For the greater part, however, the resistance movement in Twente stayed much the way it was: everyone operated on his own.

Considering, lastly, the impact of the resistance movement on society in Twente, we establish that our study makes clear that there has not been any incentive to social change. The resistance workers in Twente did not make up a movement which could initiate or expedite social change, let alone cut across social relationships. They did not form any movement at all. They were individuals maintaining secret contacts with other people, whose names were often unknown to them. They mostly looked for and found these contacts within their own familiar sociopolitical group or class. If they acquired political influence after the war in town councils or as administrators they soon found out that the society in Twente had stayed the way it was. With the exception of the town of Almelo, there was no place for resistance workers.